Political Branding in Cities

Branding is ubiquitous, yet its workings in politics are still untheorized. Drawing on the experiences of three cities on three continents, Eleonora Pasotti fills the gap by showing how cities suffering for decades from poor government, entrenched patronage, lack of development, and social conflict made a transition to a new form of governance: brand politics. Facilitated by the joint presence of direct elections, low party discipline, and high rates of municipal fiscal self-reliance, brand politics breaks a vicious cycle of skepticism and inertia and opens the window for a broad set of reforms. The theory of brand politics shows mayors emulating marketing mavericks: in commerce, consumers aspire to become different people by acquiring products; in politics, citizens support mayors’ brands because they seek to become carriers of the same values. Voting and buying have thus become increasingly synonymous in citizens’ primal search for a means of expressing their identities.

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Political Branding in Cities

THE DECLINE OF
MACHINE POLITICS IN
BOGOTÁ, NAPLES, AND
CHICAGO

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